



Mohammed Choudhury
State Superintendent of Schools

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CONTACT: Lora Rakowski, 410-767-0486
lora.rakowski@maryland.gov

Maryland Partners with USDA's Direct Certification With Medicaid Pilot Project

*Pilot Project Will Connect More Maryland Students with School Meals;
Minimize Paperwork for Families and Schools*

BALTIMORE, MD (December 17, 2021) - Maryland will increase access to free and reduced price school meals for economically disadvantaged students as one of eight states selected by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to participate in its Direct Medicaid pilot project. Leveraging the support of federal and state agencies, the Maryland State Department of Education and Maryland Department of Health will partner in the direct certification project that allow all school districts to use the expanded direct certification process. The expansion provides more Maryland students with access to free or reduced price meals, less paperwork for families, less administrative burden on schools and more accurate measurement of student need to best direct resources.

"We are excited to begin this partnership with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service as we further refine the definition of poverty and identify students experiencing the highest level of socio-economic disadvantage in Maryland," said Maryland State Superintendent of Schools Mohammed Choudhury. "Direct Medicaid certification will not only strengthen our capacity to ensure more students have access to school meals and reduce the administrative burden on our schools, it will also help us better direct additional resources to those most in need. As we emerge from the pandemic, we are eager to use all available tools to ensure that all children have access to an excellent and equitable education, especially those who have been historically underserved."

"Medicaid is so much more than just medical benefits -- it creates a broad net of security for its enrollees," said Steve Schuh, Director of Maryland's Medicaid program. "The Direct Certification program allows the state to support the nutritional needs of children and families, and it promotes healthy eating habits that allow students to make the most of their school days."

The USDA started authorizing starters to use Medicaid as a direct certification eligibility criteria since the 2012-2013 school year. Nationwide, there are currently 27 states participating in the demonstration projects. The USDA found that more than 1 million students qualified for free meals and 260,000 students qualified for reduced price meals during the 2017-2018 school year through these projects.

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